

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**SENT TO D.C.**  
7-3-03

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name : **Davis Square**

other names/site number : **Square No. 14**

**2. Location**

street & number: **4430 South Marshfield Avenue (mailing address)** \_\_\_\_\_ Not for publication

city or town : **Chicago** \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity

state **Illinois** code **IL** county **Cook** code **031** zip code **60609**

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally \_\_\_\_\_ statewide \_\_\_\_\_ locally. ( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William L. Chubb (S)HP  
Signature of certifying official

7-2-03  
Date

**Illinois Historic Preservation Agency**  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. ( \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

\_\_\_\_\_  
American Indian Tribe

**Davis Square**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

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I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain):	_____	_____

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**5. Classification**

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Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private  
 public-local  
 public-State  
 public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)  
 district  
 site  
 structure  
 object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register      N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District**

**Davis Square**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

**LANDSCAPE/ park**  
**RECREATION AND CULTURE/ outdoor recreation**  
**RECREATION AND CULTURE/ sports facility**  
**OTHER/ field house**

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

**LANDSCAPE/ park**  
**RECREATION AND CULTURE/ outdoor recreation**  
**RECREATION AND CULTURE/ sports facility**  
**OTHER/ field house**

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Beaux Arts Classicism**

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: **CONCRETE**

Roof : **ASPHALT TILES**

Walls: **CONCRETE**

Other: **EARTH**  
**VEGETATION**

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Davis Square**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

**Entertainment/ Recreation**  
**Social History**  
**Architecture**  
**Landscape Architecture**

Period of Significance: **1905 - 1953** Significant Dates: **N/A**

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above): **N/A**

Cultural Affiliation **N/A**

Architect/Builder: **Burnham, D.H & Company**  
**Olmsted Brothers**

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) **See Continuation Sheet**

**Davis Square**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property: **8.29 acres**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
	16	444463	4629109	3	16	444651	4628932
	2	16	444656	4	16	444469	4628926

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**See Continuation Sheet**

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**See Continuation Sheet**

**Davis Square**  
Name of Property

**Cook County, Illinois**  
County and State

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title: **Julia Sniderman Bachrach**

organization: **Chicago Park District**

date: **March 6, 2003**

street & number: **541 N. Fairbanks**

telephone: **(312) 742-4698**

city or town: **Chicago**

state: **IL**

zip code: **60611**

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**Additional Documentation**

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Submit the following items with the completed form:  
Continuation Sheets

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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**Property Owner**

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(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name **David Doig, General Superintendent, Chicago Park District**

street & number **541 North Fairbanks Ave.**

telephone: **(312) 742- 7529**

city or town **Chicago**

state **IL**

zip code **60611**

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

**Davis Square**

Davis Square is an 8.29-acre site located at 4400 south and 1600 west in Chicago, Illinois. Conceived as part of a revolutionary system of 14 parks in 1903, Davis Square was originally known as Park No. 14. The innovative new parks were conceived by South Park Commission General Superintendent J. Frank Foster and designed by the prominent firms, the Olmsted Brothers landscape architects, and D.H. Burnham & Co. architects. Dedicated in May of 1905, Davis Square was the third of the proposed new parks to open to the public. By the fall of 1905, a total of ten south side small parks provided recreational, social, and educational opportunities to hundreds of thousands of people in Chicago, as well as a new prototype for the design and programming of neighborhood parks throughout the nation.

Over the years, Davis Square has continuously adapted to the frequently changing needs of the surrounding community while retaining a high level of integrity. The property retains a great deal of fabric dating from its period of significance, and is primarily composed of contributing features. In order to clearly describe Davis Square and show that it retains sufficient integrity to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, three corresponding plans are submitted as part of this nomination: the original Olmsted Brothers Plan [A], a Chicago Park District plan of 1939 [B], and a recent plot plan [C].

Davis Square is bounded on the north by West 44<sup>th</sup> Street, on the south by West 45<sup>th</sup> Street, on the east by South Marshfield Ave. and the west by South Hermitage Ave. It lies in Chicago's New City community area, a neighborhood often referred to as the Back-of-the-Yards, because of its proximity to the Union Stock Yards. Featured in the 1906 novel *The Jungle*, at the turn of the century, this neighborhood was teeming with factories, slaughterhouses, railroad lines, tenement housing, and "Wiskey Row," a strip of bars frequented by the area's numerous laborers. Once home to thousands of immigrants from Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and Bohemia, the neighborhood now has a growing Latino population. Frame and brick single-family residences, two-flats and apartment buildings surround the park.

The Olmsted Brother's original plan for Davis Square [A] placed the field house in the center of the park adjacent to a rectangular ball field [1]. A wide promenade walk [2] surrounded the rectangular field. Today, the north and south ends of this walk [2] remain [C]. In 1924, the South Park Commission installed four tennis courts [3] at the north end of the ball field. The Chicago Park District upgraded the tennis courts several times over the years. In 2000, the Chicago Park District retained the fencing around the tennis courts but removed the nets and resurfaced the area converting it to soccer fields with artificial turf [3].

A small shelter appears on plans of Davis Square as early as 1905<sup>1</sup> [A]. The South Park Commission built this structure that was located on the west side of the park, adjacent to the ball field. The structure had bathrooms on each end and an open shelter in the center. The structure provided facilities to ball players and spectators during summertime and skaters during wintertime. The Chicago Park District demolished this structure in 1939.

<sup>1</sup> South Park Commission. Shelter & Closets for Davis Square. Aug 8, 1905.

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**Davis Square**

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The field house [4] is located in the center of the park. Historically, the field house and ball field were divided by an elegant concert grove. The field house's front stairway leads to this area, which was once a paved terrace with a formal grove of trees and small bandstand. Most of the old concert grove was removed in the late 1930s to provide an enlarged play field [B]. Shortly thereafter, much of the remaining part of the concert grove became a small parking lot in front of the field house. Today, there are still two lawn areas with trees flanking the entry to the field house in the parking lot.

The field house [4] is an inverted L-shape in plan, with the longer façades oriented north to south. The building is composed of exposed aggregate concrete. The north-south portion of the building has a hipped roof. This intersects with a gabled roof over the shorter portion of the building, which is oriented east to west and is located on the north side of the field house. The roofs are now clad in asphalt tiles, but were originally composed of green clay tiles.

Three rounded arched openings are located in the center of the field house's primary façade (which extends north-south). Originally, all three of these openings had double doors flanked by sidelights. At the landing of the three grand entryways, there was a long concrete platform of stairs. In 1936, the Chicago Park District retained the center doorway, and replaced the other two sets of doors with windows. This alteration was made to accommodate changes in the interior use of space. Partitions were built in the lobby to create two new offices. At that time, the Chicago Park District moved the library from its original location north of the lobby to the previous lunchroom south of the lobby, and the old library became a crafts room. In later years, the library moved out of the field house and the space was converted to a classroom.

During the 1936 alteration, the Chicago Park District retained the arched openings, installing new windows and concrete knee walls where the outer doors had been located. At that time, the Chicago Park District also retained original exposed aggregate architectural details such as pilasters flanking the arches and windows. Each of the three arches has a simple keystone. Flanking the upper portion of all three arches is an original nautilus detail molded into the concrete. Above each of the three arches are three sets of double hung windows. A stringcourse separates the lower and upper levels of the façade. Above the stringcourse, enlivening the upper portion of the façade are incised details including roundels, rectangles, and some fretwork. In 1997, the firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst and White was retained to rehabilitate the field house. Their work included installing replacement windows. In several instances, the replacement windows were more consistent with the building's original fenestration than the windows they replaced.

Sometime between the late 1950s and the mid 1960s, the original entry stairs leading to the three arched openings was removed. This elegant platform was replaced with a small concrete stairway leading only to the center doorway. In 1977, the Chicago Park District remodeled the stairway, adding a ramp on the north side of the stairs to provide accessibility for people with disabilities. The 1997 rehabilitation further improved accessibility by installing an elevator that provides access to the second floor.



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Davis Square

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On the north side of the building, the portion of the structure that is oriented east to west is adjacent to the men's gymnasium. It houses a locker room, shower room, and bathrooms. The South Park Commission enlarged this space with an addition on the east side, which was constructed in 1914. The east façade included a large arched window with union jack mullions. Unfortunately, the Chicago Park District removed this window, filling the opening with concrete that matched the outer wall, in 1936.

Despite some insensitive alterations over the years including the recent installation of cloth awnings over many of the windows on the building's primary façade, the field house retains good integrity. In 1997, a major rehabilitation project designed by Graham, Anderson, Probst, and White, the successor firm to D.H. Burnham & Co., significantly improved the appearance, condition, and historic integrity of the building. The field house retains much historic fabric including some exquisite interior details such as paired columns, pilasters, original floor treatments, and ornamental balusters. Although not original to Davis Square, the canvas mural *Constructive Recreation, the Vital Force in Character Building* has adorned the field house lobby since the late 1930s or early 1940s. Painted by acclaimed African-American muralist William Edouard Scott, the work dates to approximately 1915. It is an allegorical mural depicting men and women, many of whom are dressed in European traditional folk costumes, with objects suggesting themes of sports, recreation, the arts, and education. The figures stand in line, waiting for the opportunity to meet with an enthroned muse who looks similar to the *Statue of Liberty*. The title, *Constructive Recreation, the Vital Force in Character Building* stretches across the top of the mural.

East of the field house is the swimming pool [5]. Historically, the easternmost room on the first floor of the field house had a long counter from which soap, towels, and swimming suits were distributed to park patrons. Swimmers would exit the room directly to the pool area. Historically, there were sand courts adjacent to the swimming pool. In 1939, the Chicago Park District enlarged the pool [5] to its present size and configuration, and replaced the sand courts with concrete decking [B]. Although the pool's filtration system, tank, and lining have been improved over the years, the pool has changed little since 1939.

East of the swimming pool is the boiler house and locker room complex [6]. Historically, [A] this structure included a small, enclosed building with bathrooms and a storeroom at the north end; laundry, transformer room, storeroom, and service yard and the south end; connected by separate walled open air spaces with changing booths for men and women. A small, enclosed shower house was located in the center of the complex. In 1922, the South Park Commission demolished the laundry, transformer room, and storeroom at the south end of the complex replacing them with a boiler room house. Composed of exposed aggregate concrete, the structure has a flat roof and a tall cylindrical chimney. It is contiguous with the locker room building.

In 1936, the Chicago Park District remodeled the center part of the complex. The original shower room was demolished. It was replaced by a new addition, composed of exposed aggregate concrete, with a flat roof and with little fenestration. It spans between the original laundry bathroom building at the north end and laundry

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Davis Square

and boiler room at the south end. The addition provided separate spaces for men and women, with bathrooms, changing booths, and basket checking areas. In later years, the Chicago Park District removed the basket system and installed locker rooms.

In recent years, the Chicago Park District demolished the service yard walls to accommodate the removal of tanks as part of environment remediation efforts. There have also been severe structural problems with the construction of the 1930s pool house addition. By the 1990s, the structure was so deteriorated that the poolside wall began falling down. "Cinderblocks were used to rebuilt it quickly, so as not to interrupt the swimming season, and windows and doors were randomly inserted at haphazard intervals."<sup>2</sup> Two years later, the Chicago Park District hired David Woodhouse Architects to rehabilitate the structure. As the project did not have sufficient funding to rely upon exposed aggregate concrete, the architects began investigating alternative materials. They left the wall essentially as it is, and installed a fiberglass screen supported by steel ribs, to mask the unattractive cinderblock wall. The project has had positive reviews in publications such as *Interior Design* and *Architectural Record*.

South of the swimming pool and field house is the original women's open-air gymnasium and children's playground. The area included a feature that appeared in the designs of all of the original neighborhood parks, a circular children's wading pool [7] edged with a semi-circular platform with sand courts [8]. A semi-circular concrete bench and a pergola with a retractable awning once lined the platform. This area provided a shady resting place for mothers who watched while their children played in the wading pool and sand courts. Although the bench and pergola have been gone for decades, the area retains some historic fabric. By the 1980s, the original wading pool was converted to a spray pool. This involved a new circular basin in the center, with four water sprays on the edges of the basin. Today, the spray pool retains the wading pool's location, configuration, and the surrounding concrete platform and sand courts [8] retain original fabric and remain intact [C].

The playground [9] was updated many times over the years, although it retains its original location. The most recent playground improvement was the installation of a soft surface playground in the late 1980s. East of the playground is a large rectangular area composed of asphalt, on which there are two basketball courts. A portion of this play slab was created in the late 1930s to provide a volleyball court. It was enlarged to its present size and configuration in 1961.

North of the swimming pool and field house is the original men's open-air gymnasium [10]. Originally, this area [A] included a running track. In the late 1930s, when the Chicago Park District installed tennis courts on the north end of the ball field, the men's running track was removed. In its place, the Chicago Park District installed a ball field, volleyball court, and basketball hoops (installed on the lawn without black top). Over the years, the volleyball court and basketball hoops were removed, but the ball field [B] has remained intact.

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<sup>2</sup> Lisa Skolnik, "Club Chi-Town," (Reprinted as "Davis Square Park Pool Building") *Interior Design*, October, 2002

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**Davis Square**

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Over the years, Davis Square has adapted to changing recreational and community needs and demands. In addition, the park's landscape and architectural features have suffered from some deterioration, neglect, and insensitive alterations. Despite this, the park retains good integrity. The location of features, spatial relationships, architectural elements, some plantings, and much historic fabric remains intact. In addition, recent improvements by the Chicago Park District and its architectural consultants have improved the appearance and historic integrity of the property. In addition to its value to the surrounding neighborhood as a historic place, Davis Square continues to function as a vital community and recreational center for Chicago's south side.

**LIST OF HISTORIC RESOURCES**

**Contributing Features**

**Buildings**

Field house (4)  
Poolhouse/ Boiler Room (6)

**Sites**

Landscape including ball fields and  
Walkways (1, 2)

**Structures**

Sandcourts/ Concrete Platform (8)

**Objects**

**Non-contributing Features**

Soccer Fields (3)  
Soft surface Playground (9)  
Swimming Pool (5)  
Spraypool (7)  
Basketball Courts (10)

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Davis Square

Davis Square meets with Criterion A and Criterion C for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The property is nationally significant as part of the revolutionary plan by the South Park Commission in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to provide breathing spaces with recreational facilities and social services to the densely populated tenement districts within its jurisdiction. In addition to the innovative programming, the design of the new parks by D.H. Burnham & Co. architects and landscape architects the Olmsted Brothers influenced the development of small neighborhood parks throughout the country. The South Park Commissioners began efforts to create a system of fourteen new parks in 1903. On May 15, 1905, Davis Square was officially opened to the public. Nine others opened between April 1 and September 23, 1905. The new parks were so impressive that in 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt recommended that park administrators throughout America should "... see the magnificent system that Chicago has erected in its south park section, one of the most notable civic achievements in any American city."<sup>3</sup>

Davis Square qualifies for listing on the National Register under the multiple documentation form, "The Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District." The property is nationally significant during a period spanning from 1905 when construction commenced to 1953, the current fifty-year cut-off date for the National Register of Historic Places. The property meets with the following areas of significance: Social History, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Entertainment/ Recreation.

The South Park Commission was one of three park systems established in 1869 to create a series of parks and boulevards that would encircle Chicago. As explained in section E (page 3) of the multiple property nomination form "The Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District," the South Park Commission served a geographic region spanning from the Chicago River south to 138<sup>th</sup> Street and from Lake Michigan west to Cicero Avenue. Its jurisdiction included the towns of South Chicago, Lake, and Hyde Park. Its original parkland consisted of South Park (later renamed Jackson and Washington Parks and the Midway Plaisance) and boulevards linking the park to downtown and the West Park System.

By the late 1890s, the South Park Commissioners were concerned that the existing parkland could no longer satisfy the needs of all of the people they served. The city had experienced tremendous industrial growth and the population was surging. In 1869, when Chicago's original park commissions were formed, the city's population was 300,000. By 1900, that figure had increased to 1.7 million, and at that time nearly 750,000 people a mile away or farther from any park.<sup>4</sup>

Aware of the deplorable living and working conditions and lack of open spaces in the tenement districts within its jurisdiction, the South Park Commission drafted a bill that would empower it to build new parks for the first

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<sup>3</sup> As reprinted in South Park Commission, *Report of the South Park Commissioners For a Period of Fifteen Months from December 1, 1906 to February 29, 1908, inclusive*. Chicago: 1908, 62.

<sup>4</sup> Dwight Heald Perkins, *Report of the Special Park Commission to the City Council of Chicago on the Subject of a Metropolitan Park System*. Chicago: 1904, 39.

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**Davis Square**

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time in 30 years. The act, approved by the State Legislature in 1899, allowed for the creation of a new park if it were contiguous to an existing park or boulevard. The following year, the South Park Commission acquired a 34-acre site adjacent to a boulevard, Western Avenue, and near the Union Stock Yards. Providing ball fields, swimming and wading lagoons with changing rooms, and playgrounds, the experimental McKinley Park proved to be an immediate success. This prompted the commissioners to begin efforts to create a whole system of neighborhood parks that would provide beautiful landscapes, recreational programs and social services to the densely populated neighborhoods throughout their district.

The South Park Commission secured enabling legislation in 1901 that would allow it to issue bonds to acquire and improve new parks. This law stipulated that the proposed parks could not be more than ten acres in size. In 1902, the commissioners brought the proposal before public referendum, receiving strong public support. The following year, the South Park Commission went to the State Legislature to amend the 1901 act. The 1903 amendment, known as the Lundberg Act, removed the size limitation, allowed the park commissioners to locate the new parks anywhere in their district, and authorized the issuance of bonds. With the legal authority and funding in place, the commission began to plan the new parks.

As explained in the multiple property form, South Park Commission Superintendent, J. Frank Foster, was largely responsible for conceiving the neighborhood park concept (FIIL, p. 11). Foster believed that the new parks could function as neighborhood centers and uplift and improve the lives of the residents of the overcrowded tenement districts. He suggested that in addition to the ball fields, swimming facilities, and playgrounds that had been tested in McKinley Parks, the new parks should also a variety of features. These included separate outdoor gymnasiums for men and women, running tracks, children's sand courts, and a new type of building, the field house. Based on the precedent of Chicago's settlement houses, these innovative parks buildings "would provide athletic, educational, recreational programs and social services throughout an entire year."<sup>5</sup> This was particularly useful because Chicago's cold climate had traditionally limited the use of the parks between the late fall and early spring.

The South Park Commission hired the Olmsted Brothers landscape architects and D.H. Burnham & Company architects to design the innovative system of fourteen parks. Both firms had a long tradition of designing for Chicago's South Park System. The Olmsted Brothers were successors to Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903). Designer of many of the nation's premier parks and landscapes including New York's Central Park and the town of Riverside Illinois, Olmsted created the original plan for Chicago's South Park in 1871. In 1875, his stepson and nephew, John Charles Olmsted (1852- 1920) went into practice with him. Frederick Law Olmsted laid out the gleaming campus of the World's Columbian Exposition that opened in Jackson Park 1893. After the fair, the firm, then known as Olmsted, Olmsted, and Eliot transformed the site to back to parkland. In 1898,

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<sup>5</sup> Julia Sniderman Bachrach, *The City in a Garden: A Photographic History of Chicago's Parks*, Center for American Places, Harrisonburg, VA: 2001, 12.

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Davis Square

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John Charles and his younger stepbrother, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. formed the Olmsted Brothers firm. The brothers went on to produce plans and landscape designs for thousands of sites throughout the nation.

Daniel H. Burnham (1846 – 1912), Chicago's renowned architect and planner, helped inspire the City Beautiful Movement throughout the nation and the world. Burnham formed an 18-year partnership with John Welborn Root in 1873, and the two produced hundreds of buildings and helped develop the Chicago School of Architecture. Burnham & Root designed several buildings for the South Park Commission including the stables and refectory buildings in Washington Park. Root died suddenly in 1891, while deeply involved in planning the World's Columbian Exposition. Burnham took over preparations for the fair and his firm became known as D.H. Burnham and Company. Burnham and architect Edward H. Bennett (1874- 1954) authored the seminal *1909 Plan of Chicago*. Burnham's firm also produced city plans for Cleveland, San Francisco, and Manila.

Early in 1904, both the Olmsted Brothers and D.H. Burnham and Company entered into contracts with the South Park Commission to collaboratively design the 14 parks. At the time, Burnham was awaiting the arrival of a young designer from New York, Edward Bennett, joining the firm specifically to work on this project. Therefore, the landscape design proceeded ahead of the architecture, with the Olmsted Brothers submitting preliminary plans on March 1, 1904, even before Bennett arrived and began designing the buildings.<sup>6</sup>

The original plan for a system of fourteen new parks included seven considered squares because they were less than ten acres in size and seven known as small parks because they were larger than ten acres. The design for each of the fourteen parks was to include the program components conceived by Superintendent Foster. In the Olmsted Brothers initial recommendations of the design of the squares and small parks, they expressed a strong feeling that most, if not all, of the properties should be designed in a formal idiom. Having designed beautiful large romantic landscapes along side their father, Frederick Law Olmsted Sr., they were afraid that informal designs on such small sites would become "a petty rendering of what can be far better accomplished in parks many times as large."<sup>7</sup>

The need to fit in all of the program requirements was most challenging in the design of the squares. In order to create a unified and attractive composition that would incorporate such extensive programming, the Olmsted Brothers drew ideas from the emerging fields of city planning and zoning which were particularly taking shape in Europe. A 1903 sketch of a prototypical square reflected the Olmsted Brothers approach to organizing the functions within the small sites. In this sketch:

All park activities were divided by type of facility needed and placed in different zones of

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<sup>6</sup> William W. Tippens and Julia Sniderman, "The Planning and Design of Chicago's Neighborhood Parks," *A Breath of Fresh Air: Chicago's Neighborhood Parks of the Progressive Reform Era 1900-25*, Chicago: The Chicago Public Library and the Chicago Park District, 1989, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Correspondence from Olmsted Brothers to Henry G. Foreman, President of the South Park Commission. December 7, 1903, 11 Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

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the park. Women's activities were separated from men's. Facilities requiring supervision were clustered along a single edge of the park. The front entry court, children's playground area, running track, wading pool, men's and women's open air gymnasiums, swimming tank, and changing booths were symmetrically arranged around the field house. The remaining portion of the park was devoted to a ball field and areas for passive pursuits.<sup>8</sup>

Walkways edged with trees and shrubbery bordered the ball field and smaller lawn areas, and a concert grove with formally planted trees and a bandstand flanked the entry to the field house.

In their early recommendations for the entire system of new parks, the Olmsted Brothers asserted that although many of the sites would offer similar accommodations "it would be undesirable to make these playgrounds substantially all alike."<sup>9</sup> They suggested that varying the designs could prove challenging due to the similarities in the characteristics of the sites and program requirements. The five sites that were ten acres or less, which had been designated as squares, were particularly similar:

"Considering that a number of them are precisely alike as to area, shape and arrangement of surrounding streets, and that all are flat and completely devoid of any topographical or other important controlling conditions which might be availed of in making plans for them it will not be an easy matter to find good reasons or differentiating them."<sup>10</sup>

The solution was often to allow natural characteristics of the site to influence the differences in the designs. When the unimproved site was lower than the surrounding streets, the play field could be depressed. If the surrounding streets were not highly traveled, the play field could be left without walls or fencing. If the neighborhood pedestrian traffic warranted, there could be diagonal paths across the field.

Davis Square's layout relates quite closely to the 1903 Olmsted Brothers sketch for a prototypical 10-acre park. The square was divided into two parts. One half of the park was composed of a rectangular ball field surrounded by formal rows of trees and a walkway, and shrubbery around the outer border. The other half of the park included the field house and swimming pool in the center, flanked by the men's open air gymnasium on one side and the women's open air gymnasium, children's wading pool, and playground on the other.

John Charles Olmsted met with J. Frank Foster in Chicago on February 1, 1904 to review the plans for the 14 new parks. Foster approved the preliminary plan for Davis Square with a minor revision—that an additional

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<sup>8</sup> William W. Tappan, "The Olmsted Brothers in the Midwest," *Midwestern Landscape Architecture*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana: 2000, 169.

<sup>9</sup> Correspondence from Olmsted Brothers to Henry G. Foreman, President of the South Park Commission. December 7, 1903, 2, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

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entrance to the park would be added along Marshfield Avenue.<sup>11</sup> Plans for the park's buildings proceeded in the spring after the young architect, Edward H. Bennett joined Burnham's firm. When Bennett joined the project, "he entered an undefined area in architecture."<sup>12</sup>

D.H. Burnham & Co. already had a long and productive relationship with the South Park Commission. Earlier park structures, however, tended to have a utilitarian purpose such as horse stables, or a singular function emphasizing passive recreation, such as a refectory, and most of these were only open during summer months. Superintendent J. Frank Foster intended for the new park architecture to achieve much more. Inspired by Chicago's settlement house movement, these buildings were intended as vehicles of social reform. The structures would include indoor gymnasiums, allowing for year-round active recreation in the parks for the first time. Clubrooms, auditoriums and the earliest branches of the Chicago Public Library would be included, and various lectures and classes would be provided, making the field houses social and educational centers in the community. There would be locker rooms with showers and swimming pools, offering many tenement district residents their only access to public bathing.

Foster, the South Park Commissioners, Burnham, and Bennett all shared the belief that the aesthetics of the park buildings could have an important impact on the immigrants living in filthy, squalid neighborhoods. According to one architectural critic of the period:

"The effect of a good building, in which an untrained boy studies or plays, is far more insidious than is that of some imposing, but remote public monuments... Such surrounding cannot fail in the long run to make for a higher standard of public or private taste."<sup>13</sup>

Like the landscapes, the buildings of the new neighborhood parks all had similar characteristics, but the plans and details were individualized to make each site unique. Bennett varied the architectural design from park to park depending on size, neighborhood context, and landscape design.

Despite the differences in each design, Bennett relied on the same style and materials for all of the parks. Having been trained at the Ecolé des Beaux Arts in Paris, Bennett fit well into Burnham's firm that helped inspire the City Beautiful Movement through prominent commissions for monumental buildings and civic plazas throughout the nation. Bennett's park designs echoed the classicism of the World's Columbian

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<sup>11</sup> Report of John Charles Olmsted after his visit to Chicago of Feb. 1, 1904, 3, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division

<sup>12</sup> William W. Tippens and Julia Sniderman, "The Planning and Design of Chicago's Neighborhood Parks," *A Breath of Fresh Air: Chicago's Neighborhood Parks of the Progressive Reform Era 1900-25*, Chicago: The Chicago Public Library and the Chicago Park District, 1989, 24.

<sup>13</sup> "Chicago Parks and Their Landscape Architecture," *Architectural Record*, v. 24, July, 1908, 26.



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Exposition and in fact, in a 1905 article, South Park Commission President Henry Foreman suggested that the new parks “reflected in miniature the architectural beauty of the White City.”<sup>14</sup> Many of the plans for the new neighborhood park architecture involved a complex of buildings organized around an outdoor swimming pool representing in a small scale the World’s Fair’s Court of Honor. These new structures also emulated the fair buildings of a decade earlier because they were rendered in the Beaux Arts style, and had classical ornamentation molded into the surface of the building material.

The building material selected for the whole system of new park buildings was exposed aggregate concrete. From this material, which was also known as “marblecrete” or popcorn concrete,” buildings could be constructed quickly, relatively inexpensively, and ornamentation could be molded directly into facades. Although the buildings relied on classical details, the material allows for a visible expression of the small pieces of aggregate, and the rough-cast character required that details be rendered in a simplified vocabulary devoid of intricacies.

Bennett’s plans for the architectural complex in Davis Square included a Classically designed field house that included an auditorium, clubrooms, library, lunchroom, and men and women’s indoor gymnasiums and locker rooms. East of field house was a rectangular swimming pool. Although many of the plans for the other new parks had field house complexes that completely surrounded the swimming pool, at Davis Square, the north and south sides of the pool were open. These areas did not have pergolas or the walls of the second building—and were only enclosed by fencing.

The secondary building, on the east side of the swimming pool, included a boiler room, laundry, open air changing rooms, bathrooms, and a shower room for swimmers. There was also a small open air shelter with bathrooms on the north side of the ball field. Davis Square’s architectural plans were completed in early August of 1904, and the South Park Commission awarded contracts for the construction on August 31, 1904<sup>15</sup>.

The South Park Commissioners approved all of the names for the new parks in August of 1904. They selected names that referred to important figures and aspects of national, regional and Chicago history. Davis Square was named in honor of Dr. Nathan Smith Davis (1817- 1904), one of the most significant figures in Chicago’s medical history. Dr. Davis served as the chairman of physiology and general pathology for Rush Medical College. He went on to Lind University, forerunner to the medical department of Northwestern University. He was a founder of Mercy Hospital, the Chicago Medical Society, and the American Medical Association. Dr. Davis was also a prolific writer of medical texts and for many years served as editor of the *Northwestern Medical Journal*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Henry G. Foreman, “Chicago’s New Park Service,” *Century*, v. 69, February, 1905, 610-20.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of the South Park Commissioners, Aug. 31, 1904, v. 8, p. 182.

<sup>16</sup> Julia S. Bachrach and Elizabeth Ann Patterson, *Historic Profile of Davis Square* on-line at [www.chicagoparkdistrict.com](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com).

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Davis Square's construction was completed in early spring of 1905 and the park officially opened on May 15, 1905. Two other small parks opened earlier that spring, and by the end of September, 1905, a total of ten new South Park Commission parks had been dedicated and made available to densely populated communities that surrounded them.

Superintendent Foster, the South Park Commissioners, and some of the city's leading social reformers were equally excited about the potential impact that the new parks would have for the poor immigrants who lived in the neighborhoods that surrounded them. Mary McDowell, an associate of Jane Addams and head of the nearby University of Chicago settlement house, organized the dedication ceremonies for Davis Square that took place on May 13, 1905.<sup>17</sup> An audience of 4000 attended the event. At the event, South Park Commission President Henry G. Foreman made a speech asserting his belief in the new park system and its moralistic influences:

...When you people who live in this part of Chicago come home tired at night, or when you have a holiday, or when you are tempted to do something wrong, come over here and listen to the music. Come and see your children work in the gymnasium; come and take a bath or swim, or see the trees and flowers. When you are hungry you can buy what you want to eat at what it costs us. If there is anything about this district that you don't like, call a meeting in this room and talk it over. Use this assembly hall freely for any good purpose, except for religious or political meetings."<sup>18</sup>

By the end of 1906, the branch libraries in the new neighborhood parks had an annual attendance of more than 600,000; the lunch-rooms served over 425,000 meals; the bathing facilities had been used more than 800,000 times, and the ten new parks had served more than 5 million people in congested south side districts.<sup>19</sup>

It was quickly apparent that the new south park prototype would soon provide a national model for park development. The Olmsted Brothers promoted the concept through city planning groups and conferences. Daniel H. Burnham and Edward Bennett incorporated the concept in their 1905 San Francisco Plan, "and in the 1907 St. Louis City Plan, the published report of which contained illustrations of Chicago's small parks."<sup>20</sup> Historian Joan Draper has documented how quickly and profusely information on Chicago's new south side parks was disseminated:

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<sup>17</sup> Dominic Pacyga, "Parks for the People," *A Breath of Fresh Air: Chicago's Neighborhood Parks of the Progressive Reform Era 1900-1925*, Chicago: The Chicago Public Library and the Chicago Park District, 1989, 17.

<sup>18</sup> "Chicago Has been Slow in Park Development—Recent Vital Awakening—Plans for a Wonderful System—Small Parks Already Established and Models of What a Park Should Be," *Chicago Tribune*, May 14, 1905.

<sup>19</sup> *Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners for the Fiscal Year 1906*, Chicago: 1907, 59-61

<sup>20</sup> Joan E. Draper, "Park Planning in Chicago: Art and Science. The South Park District's Small Parks of 1902-1905 and Park Planning in the United States," *Planning the Twentieth Century American City*, Christopher Silver and Mary Corbin Sies, eds, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 102.

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“The widely disseminated 1909 Plan of Chicago included a site plan of the largest of the new parks, Sherman Park, along with photographs of two others. Illustrations of “typical examples,” from the South Side of Chicago, usually Davis or Armour Square soon appeared in books about park design aimed at professionals.”<sup>21</sup>

Park administrators, social reformers, and advocates of the playground movement throughout the nation also became well acquainted with the new parks when they attended the Playground Association of America’s first annual conference, which took place in Chicago in the summer of 1907.

Throughout its early history, Davis Square received intensive use from the public. At the end of 1906, the park’s first full year, the commissioners calculated that its facilities had been used a total of 752,782 times over the course of the year.<sup>22</sup> In the early 1920s, after a number of other small parks had opened, that figure remained high. The annual use of the park’s facilities at the end of 1922 totaled 569,441.<sup>23</sup>

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, there were many park programs offered at Davis Square and there were also numerous clubs and organizations that used the park. The park had a girls’ sewing school with 100 members, a women’s sewing club, a Boy Scout Troop, and a girls’ dramatic club. There were also parties and pageants for holidays, outdoor movies, night-school English lessons, several baseball and basketball leagues, sand craft contests, horseshoe tournaments, and a model airplane tournament.

By the early 1930s, there were 22 separate park districts operating simultaneously in Chicago, including the South Park Commission. The Great Depression rendered all of these independent agencies financially insolvent. To gain access to federal funding through President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal, voters approved the Park Consolidation Act of 1934, through which all 22 agencies were unified into the Chicago Park District.

Between 1935 and 1941, the newly consolidated Chicago Park District received more than \$82 million in federal funding through the WPA (Works Progress Administration) and PWA (Project Works Administration). State and city funds increased this total to more than \$100 million.<sup>24</sup> Using these funds, the park district made numerous improvements throughout the system, which then included 130 parks with a total of 83 field houses and 50 swimming pools.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>22</sup> *Annual Report of the South Park Commissioners for the Fiscal Year 1906*, Chicago: 1907, 59.  
<sup>23</sup> *South Park Commissioners, Report for a Period of Twent-four Months from March 1, 1922 to February 29, 1924, Inclusive*, Chicago: 1924, 97.  
<sup>24</sup> Julia Sniderman Bachrach, *The City in a Garden: A Photographic History of Chicago’s Parks*, Center for American Places, Harrisonburg, VA: 2001, 24.

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In Davis Square, improvements were made to increase and support the recreational uses of the site. In 1936, the Chicago Park District demolished the shower room and open air dressing area and replaced them with a new bathhouse with showers, bathrooms, and dressing booths. Over the next couple of years, additional trees and shrubs were planted throughout the park. The Chicago Park District demolished the shelter building that was on the west side of the ball field. Tennis courts were built at the north end of the ball field. The men's running track was removed, and replaced with a playground area for older children and adults, with a volleyball court, a basketball court, and a softball field.

Sometime after 1938, a large mural entitled *Constructive Recreation: The Vital Force in Character Building* was installed in the Davis Square Field house. Originally displayed in Washington Park, the mural was trimmed down slightly and moved to its current location in Davis Square. William Edouard Scott (1884- 1964), an African-American painter, created the mural around 1915. Scott studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he received numerous honors, scholarships, and awards. After he continued his training in Paris, he returned to America, spending time in Tuskegee, Alabama where he painted a double portrait of Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver as well as scenes of ordinary southern African-Americans.<sup>25</sup> In 1931, Scott received the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship. Although *Constructive Recreation: The Vital Force in Character Building* was moved from another park, it was appropriate for Davis Square. It depicts immigrants engaged in sports, the arts, and education unifying into the American culture.

Over the years, Davis Square has continuously provided a variety of athletic, recreational, social, and educational programs and services to the community. Although it has adapted to modern needs, the park retains a good deal of historic fabric. Today Davis Square offers many of the same kinds of programs as were historically offered in the park such as preschool classes, basketball, baseball, boxing, swimming, and arts and crafts. The park continues to be a vital part of its south side community.

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<sup>25</sup> William E. Taylor and Harriet G. Warkel, *A Shared Heritage: Art by Four African Americans*, Indiana Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press, 1996: 22.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The property is bounded on the north by the south curb-line of West 44<sup>th</sup> Street, on the south by the north curb-line of West 45<sup>th</sup> Street, on the east by the west curb-line of South Marshfield Avenue, and on the west by the east curb-line of South Hermitage Avenue.

**Boundary Justification**

This is the plot of land historically associated with the park during its periods of significance.

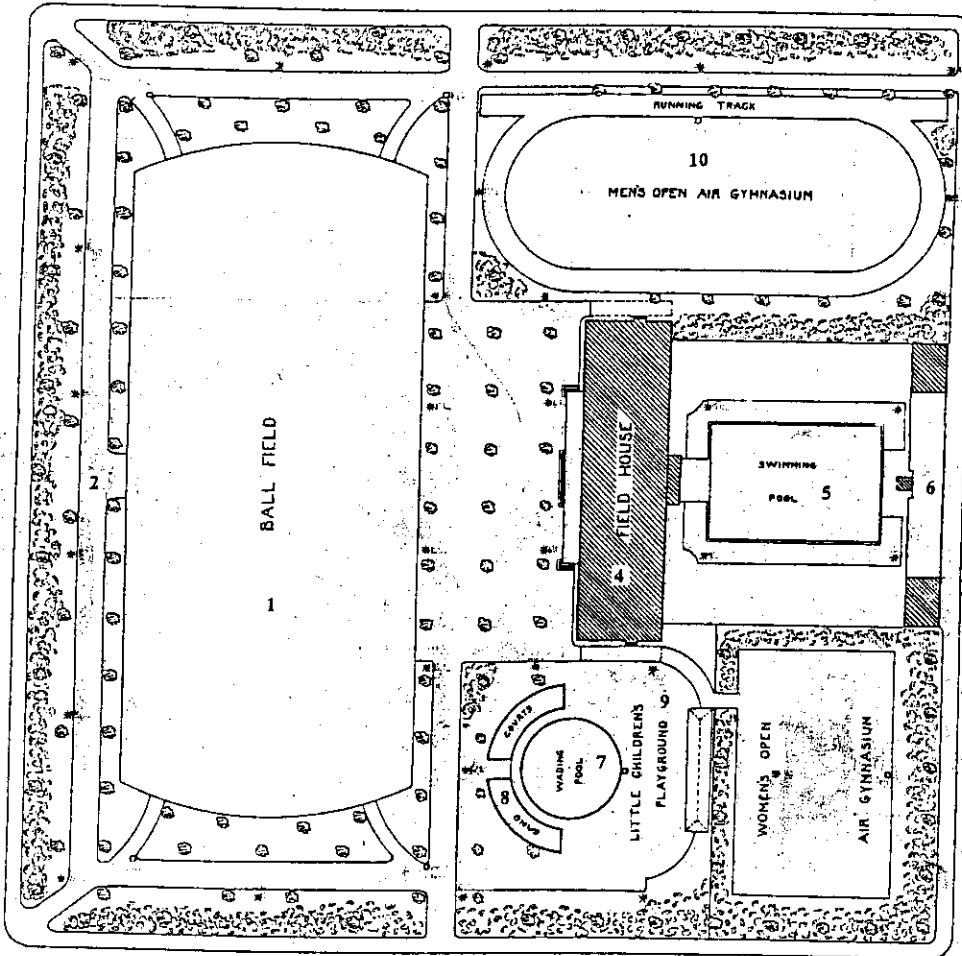
SOUTH PARK COMMISSIONERS  
DAVIS SQUARE  
CHICAGO  
1904

A

OLMSTED BROS.  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

44<sup>TH</sup> ST.

HERMITAGE AVE.

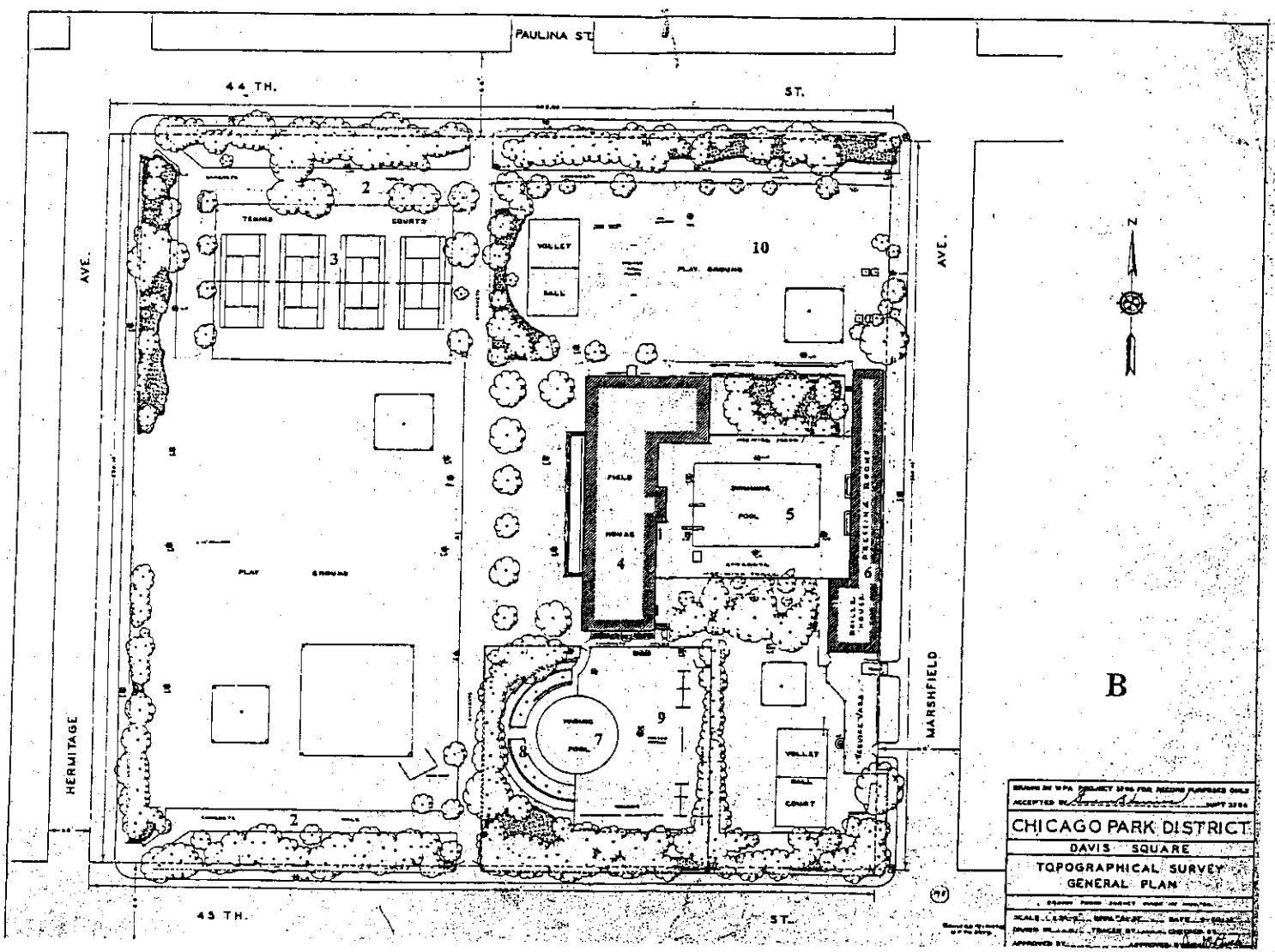


MARSHFIELD AVE.

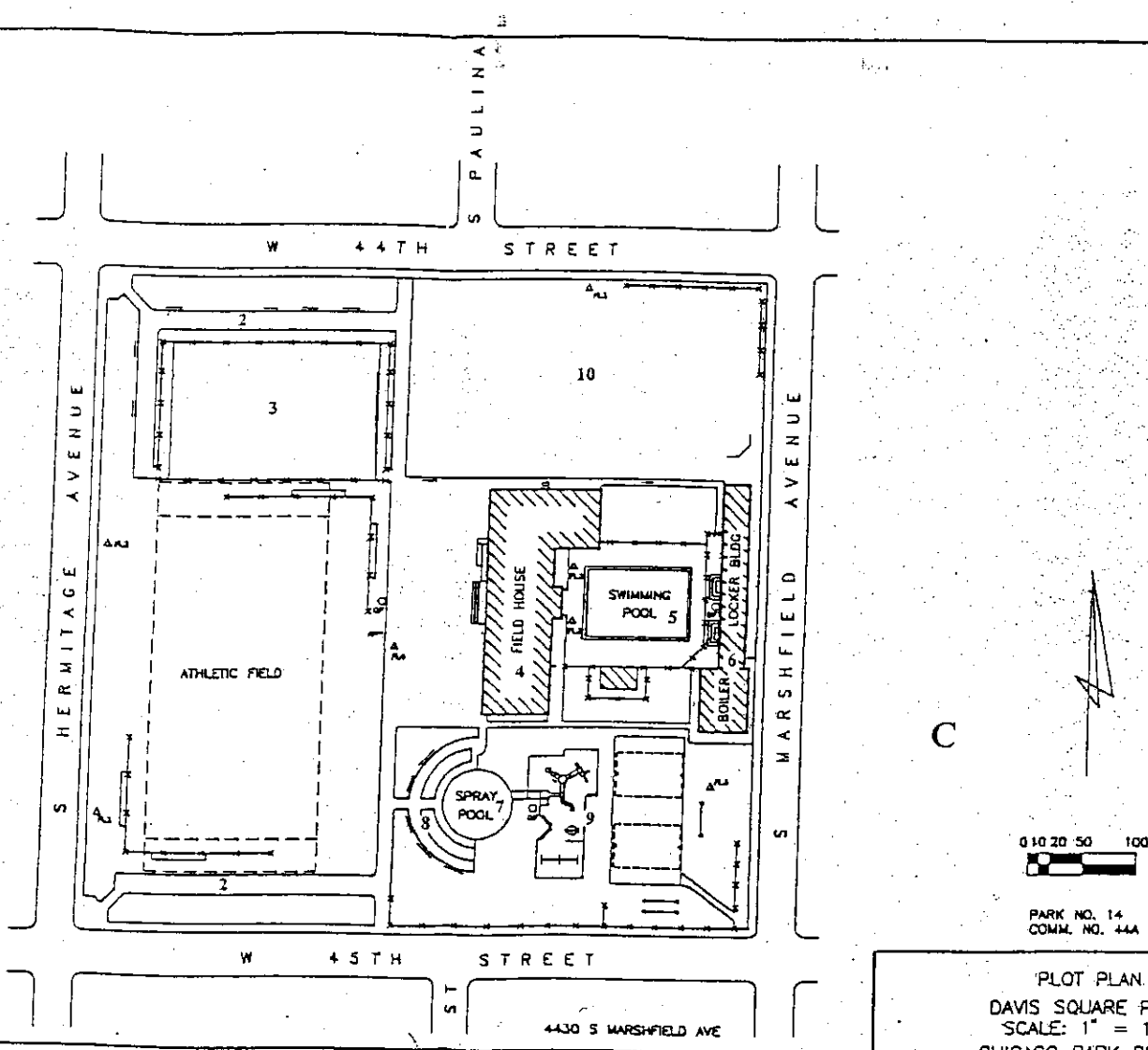
45<sup>TH</sup> ST.

OLDER Davis Square  
George F. Johnson

1904 PLAN  
Davis Square, Chicago  
Cook County, IL



1939 Plan  
 Davis Square, Chicago  
 Cook County, IL



C

PLOT PLAN  
 DAVIS SQUARE PARK  
 SCALE: 1" = 100'  
 CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT

Current Plan, Davis Square  
 Chicago, Cook County, Illinois

- Landscape including ball fields and Walkways (1, 2)--contributing
- Soccer Fields (3)--non-contributing
- Field house (4) --contributing
- Swimming Pool (5) --non-contributing
- Poolhouse/ Boiler Room (6) --contributing
- Spraypool (7) --non-contributing
- Sandcourts/ Concrete Platform (8) --contributing
- Soft surface Playground (9) --non-contributing
- Basketball Courts (10) --non-contributing

Saint Johns vicinity, 97000347,  
LISTED, 8/19/03

ARKANSAS, UNION COUNTY,  
El Dorado Commercial Historic District,  
Courthouse Square, portions of Main, Jefferson, Washington, Jackson, Cedar and  
Locust Sts.,  
El Dorado, 03000773,  
LISTED, 8/21/03

CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES COUNTY,  
Andalusia,  
1471-1475 Havenhurst Dr.,  
Los Angeles, 03000775,  
LISTED, 8/21/03

COLORADO, DENVER COUNTY,  
McPhee and McGinnity Paint Factory,  
2519 Walnut St.,  
Denver, 03000776,  
LISTED, 8/21/03

COLORADO, SAN MIGUEL COUNTY,  
Rio Grande Southern Railroad Trout Lake Water Tank,  
along North Trout Lake Rd.,  
Ophir vicinity, 03000777,  
LISTED, 8/21/03

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STATE EQUIVALENT,  
Springland Springhouse--Springland (Boundary Increase),  
3517 Springland Ln, NW,  
Washington, 03000779,  
LISTED, 8/21/03

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,  
Armour Square,  
Bounded by W 33rd St., W 34th Place, S. Wells Ave. and S. Shields Ave.,  
Chicago, 03000789,  
LISTED, 8/19/03  
(Chicago Park District MPS)

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,  
Calumet Park,  
9801 South Avenue G,  
Chicago, 03000788,  
LISTED, 8/21/03  
(Chicago Park District MPS)

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,  
Davis Square,  
Roughlu bounded by W. 44th St., W, 45th St., S. Marshfield Ave. and S.  
Hemitage Ave.,  
Chicago, 03000787,  
LISTED, 8/18/03  
(Chicago Park District MPS)

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,  
Palmolive Building,  
919 N. Michigan Ave.,  
Chicago, 03000784,  
LISTED, 8/21/03

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,  
Reid House,